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TAGS: [AMGT](#) [AORC](#) [APER](#) [PREL](#) [UNGA](#) [UNGA](#)
SUBJECT: U.S. EFFORTS TO REFORM UN HUMAN RESOURCES
MANAGEMENT PRACTICES BRING MIXED RESULTS

REF: 08 STATE 129988

¶1. SUMMARY: The recently concluded main session of the sixty-third United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on human resources management (HRM) reform that will result in significant changes in hiring mechanisms and conditions of service for field staff. The resolution (to be issued as A/RES/63/250) also addresses a number of other personnel management areas, including recruitment and staffing, geographical and gender representation, and ethics. The new system is structured somewhat differently and is more costly than what we proposed (reftel) but generally reflects the compromise on which there was near consensus during the resumed session last March, except for the U.S. and Japan (and a few others who did not speak up, e.g., Russia and Mexico). In the face of opposition by the same states that were prepared to join consensus last March, including the EU and CANZ, to alternatives raised by the U.S. and Japan, and given the importance of taking action on this critical matter, after consulting the Department, we joined consensus on the resolution. Post did obtain a number of key concessions that addressed USG concerns that underpinned our proposals, including abuses in the use of temporary contracts at Headquarters, the wholesale conversion of 300 and 200 Series contracts to 100 Series, and the need for a disciplined approach to implementing continuing contracts.
END SUMMARY.

STREAMLINING OF CONTRACTS AND HARMONIZATION OF CONDITIONS OF SERVICE APPROVED

¶2. These were the two principal HRM issues before the Fifth Committee and were directly related to problems with recruitment and retention of international staff in field missions. Attempts to reach consensus on HRM reform began last March, during the first resumed session of the 62nd UNGA, but were put off when the U.S. and Japan (with silent support from Mexico and Russia) could not agree to measures supported by the Secretariat and other Member States (European Union, CANZ, G-77 and China). We said we would develop other options for the Fifth Committee to consider and presented our proposal prior to the start of the 63rd UNGA. We proposed the same overall contract structure as the Secretariat but tied length of service to allowances and benefits, i.e., the longer a person stayed with the organization the more allowances and benefits would they accrue. Although a number of Member States, including Japan, Russia, Singapore, and some small European countries, expressed support for our proposal, the overwhelming majority rejected our approach.

¶3. Efforts to obtain wider support for our proposal (reftel) were not successful. However, we did succeed in eliminating longstanding and costly abuses in the use of temporary contracts at UN Headquarters that should also result in some significant savings (See A/RES/63/250, Section II, paras. 7 and 8). In addition, we were able to include measures to ensure that staff holding fixed-term contracts under the new

100 Series will have no expectation of their contract being renewed or extended (Section II, para. 21). This will give the organization greater flexibility in terms of workforce planning and prevent automatic conversion to a continuing (i.e., open-ended) contract.

¶4. We also obtained assurances that the thousands of staff currently on short term temporary contracts, e.g., 300 Series, would not immediately receive unrestricted 100 Series contracts. Instead, they would receive 100 Series mission-specific contracts with the opportunity to compete for the unrestricted 100 Series contracts. We obtained a similar concession regarding staff serving in Headquarters under 200 Series contracts (Section II, paras. 10 and 11).

¶5. Finally, even though the new system will go into effect on July 1, 2009, we obtained a delay in implementation of a continuing contract regime until January 2010, pending fleshing out and agreement on details on how continuing contracts would be awarded (Section II, paras. 3 and 4). We also obtained agreement to a number of our proposals on enhancing career development, e.g., how and where P-1 positions (i.e., the lowest entry level for professional staff) might be used more effectively and development of a strategy for training and development in the context of the next biennium budget submission (Section VIII, paras 3 and 4).

¶6. The next step toward implementation of the new contract structure will be consideration of draft regulations; the Fifth Committee will take this up in the first resumed session in March. In the sixty-fourth UNGA, the Fifth Committee will have an opportunity to consider many factors related to continuing appointments, including criteria for

eligibility, the strengthening of the performance appraisal system, and the financial and management implications of converting fixed-term to continuing appointments and whether to establish a ceiling on such conversions. The Secretary-General's proposal to create a cadre of civilian career peacekeepers, which the Secretariat maintains would not be necessary under the new regime, will, nonetheless, be reconsidered in the sixty-fifth session (Section II, para. 19).

¶7. The new contract regime and the harmonizing of conditions of service for staff in field duty stations are designed to attract and retain qualified staff. There is an expectation that the new regime would obviate the need for special allowances and it is in our interest to work with the Secretariat and member states to reduce staffing gaps at Special Political Missions (SPM's) and Peacekeeping Operations (PKO's). We are hopeful this resolution will have its intended effect. In any event, there is nothing in the resolution that abolishes the concept of special allowances, and we are free to raise that concept if the new regime fails in particular instances, such as UNAMI or UNAMA, to address this concern.

ROSTER SYSTEM NOT ADOPTED

¶8. In considering ways to expedite the UN's recruitment and staffing process, the Fifth Committee decided not to approve implementation of a new pre-screened roster system, citing design flaws in existing rosters. The current resolution calls for the Secretariat to improve its outreach efforts, to continue to advertise all specific vacancy announcements, and to ensure the transparency of the recruitment process. A report on efforts to improve the length of time it takes to fill a position (currently 160 days) will be part of the Secretary-General's report on human resources management at the sixty-fifth UNGA.

GENDER BALANCE AND GEOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION: HIGH VISIBILITY BUT NO CHANGE IN COURSE

¶9. During the Fall session the Fifth Committee devoted a lot of time to the issues of gender balance and geographical

representation, with the EU and CANZ leading discussion on the former and Japan and the G-77 making a case for the latter. In the end, no major changes in policy or practice were incorporated in the resolution. The Fifth Committee requested the Secretary-General to report on measures to achieve gender balance and increase the number of staff from under-represented and un-represented countries at the sixty-fifth UNGA.

ROLE OF ETHICS OFFICE TO BE CLARIFIED

¶10. The Fifth Committee, with post playing a leading role, devoted considerable time to the Secretary-General's report on the activities of the Ethics Office, established in 2006 to promote integrity within the organization. As part of its resolution on HRM, the Fifth Committee requested the Secretary-General to clarify the roles of the Ethics Office, Office of the Ombudsman, Office of Internal Oversight and other related offices and report at the sixty-fifth session on measures taken to avoid overlapping of mandates (Section XII, para. 3). At post's request, the Committee also called for the annual ethics report to include information on system-wide Ethics Committee activities (Section XII, para. 5).

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